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PROGRAM The MacNeil/Lehrer Report

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DATE March 9, 1982 7:30 PM CITY Washington, DC

SUBJECT The Secrecy Issue

ROBERT MACNEIL: Tonight, the secrecy issue: Should government tighten its rules to protect the nation's secrets?

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MACNEIL: Watergate and reaction to the Vietnam War caused something of a rush to make the United States Government less secretive. Under President Carter, the philosophy was: If in doubt whether publishing a fact will harm national security or not, then publish it. Now critics say the Reagan Administration is reversing that philosophy to: When in doubt, keep it secret.

The Administration has proposed tightening up the Freedom of Information Act to exempt the Central Intelligence Agency. It has proposed upgrading the classification of documents; in effect, to make more documents secret. It has abolished the public affairs office through which the CIA explained its actions to the public. It has restricted the freedom of government officials to talk to the press. And the White House has lent its support to legislation, now nearing final passage in Congress, making it illegal to reveal some classified information or disclose the names of CIA agents.

Tonight, where does all this lead, and how much secrecy is enough?

JIM LEHRER: Robin, one of the major supporters of the push to tighten up is Jack Maury, President of the Association of Former Intelligence Agents. Mr. Maury was Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs in the Ford Administration, and before that spent 28 years as a Central Intelligence Agency